

## **Uyghur Tribunal – Fact Witness statement**

### **UTFW2-061 – Abdurehim Gheni**

1. My name is Abdurehim Gheni, and I am from Uchturpan County, Aksu Province, East Turkestan. I was born there. On July 5, 2007, I was forced to quit my job at Aksu Provincial Pedagogical School and had to come to the Netherlands to seek political asylum. Now I live in the Netherlands. My wife and I as well as our three children are all Dutch citizens
2. Factors that forced me to quit my job at the Aksu Prefectural Pedagogical School are as follows. I was a chemistry teacher at the Aksu Pedagogical School from June 2002 to November 2005, a manager of a chemistry lab, and a teacher of chemistry labs. Here are some photos of me at the time. In 2004, as a result of the Chinese government's policy of developing and assisting Uyghurs in bilingual education in East Turkestan, which led to many Chinese people migrating from the mainland to teach in various primary and secondary schools.
3. Thirty Chinese teachers were assigned to our school under that policy. Originally, the Aksu Provincial Pedagogical School had about two hundred teachers and staff working in various natural science teaching groups. After the arrival of the Chinese teachers, they were distributed to different teaching groups. The bio-chemistry teaching group that I was working in then had five Uyghurs and one Chinese teacher. From 2002, the year when I started working, to 2004, six Chinese joined our teaching group, and they were to teach Chinese language, chemistry, biology in Chinese. I had been working for two years by then. In our teaching group, there were five Uyghurs, seven Chinese, and the Chinese had become the majority.
4. Before these Chinese teachers formally started teaching, our Principal put me in charge of training them. I would show them the labs, explain the main points and challenges of the experiments, and go through experiments in advance, making sure it was successful. These tasks were assigned to me by the school administration. The school's secretary at that time was Liu Bing Bing, and others included the Principal

Litip Rizak, Academic Directors Hamit Rustam and Litip Rizak, and Deputy Principal Nur Qasim, who was in charge of teaching. They made the decision for me to train Chinese teachers and prepare them for classes.

5. Now there were two critical things here: to collect chlorine gas in the laboratory and to dilute the concentrated sulfuric acid in the laboratory. These were lab experiments that needed to be demonstrated to and then conducted by the students on their own. I explained to those Chinese teachers in details the difficult parts of the experiments, the important things, and the consequences of not doing it right. Before they started teaching, I went over everything with them. When they instructed the classes, the students were poisoned because the chlorine gas leaked into the air in the classroom due to something going wrong during the chlorine gas collection process. The chlorine gas was of strong toxicity. This was what happened. Similarly, on dilution of concentrated sulfuric acid, I trained those Chinese teachers in the same way to prepare them for classes. During the demonstration to the class, a Chinese teacher made a mistake, causing a thick sulfuric acid to spill out and burn the students' faces. This injured the students because it was an acid with a strong sulfuric burning capability.
6. This resulted in the school administration criticizing me for failing to train those Chinese teachers well. I couldn't accept it and argued that I also graduated from Lanzhou University in the north-western region of China. When I started, there was no one guiding me. I just read the books, studied the textbooks, and went through the classes all by myself. It was the school administration that introduced those Chinese, who supposedly graduated from universities in the north-western China like me and got hired by our school. However, I did not see any quality in these college graduates. I doubt they were in university. I was not sure whether the school had seen their diplomas before hiring them. Were they qualified for being formal teachers? A person without a teaching certificate would not be qualified for being a teacher. I requested to see their teacher's license.

7. School administration criticized me for arguing and told me that I had no right to check their diplomas. I didn't agree with the school leaders. In a big meeting, Abdurehim as well as others was pointed out that I was creating tensions and distrust among teachers by requesting to see other teachers' diplomas. And teachers strongly criticized me for not having such right. I was skeptical that those teachers had graduated from universities in north-western China, and I realized that people who had not graduated from colleges, or even a technical school of the high-school level, they lacked a good education background and came to our school. I repeatedly asked the school leadership that they were not qualified for teaching students and enter the labs. This kind of conflicts happened several times and I was always criticized by the school leaders, who insisted that those Chinese teachers would learn it gradually. Later, I was asked to teach the chemistry course by myself while they sat in class to watch me. Consequently, I felt pressure from the school, and my end-of-year performance review and promotion were affected. At school I was isolated and eventually had to quit my job. In other words, it led to my expulsion from school.
  
8. While I was still teaching there from 2002 to 2003, for two consecutive years, I had to take the students to the 2nd and 3rd divisions of the "Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps" to pick cotton. Every time, we had to work there for two months from September to October. Students got up at six every morning and ate a piece of steamed bun with some rice soup. Cotton picking in the field lasted till 12:00 p.m., during which there was only a ten-minute break every two hours, before lunch. The cotton picked by the students would be weighed and collected. The lunch time was from 12:00 to 12:30 p.m. And each student would get a piece of naan bread, which was far from enough. The students would ask the teachers whether they could get more food. I reported this issue to the school. Not only did the school leaders not listen to me, but I was criticized again. By 6:00 p.m., the students would turn in the cotton and return to the kitchen. There they would have dinner together, which was never cooked with meat.
  
9. The place where they slept at night was the animal enclosure that the Chinese had set up there for sheep and pigs. They just put some straw on the ground for the students

to sleep on it. These were the things I had seen and witnessed. Students had daily tasks. Students from Aksu Provincial Pedagogical School were between fifteen and eighteen years old, and they would be teachers at various elementary schools after graduation. The requirement for the amount of cotton to be picked daily was 35 kg for fifteen-year-olds, 37 kg for sixteen-year-olds, and 39 kg for eighteen-year-olds. Students would be penalized if they failed to reach their daily target. For the daily task of 39 kg, for example, the student that picked 30 kg of cotton would be fined the remaining 9 kg. Whatever amount a student could miss in the end, he or she had to pay the penalty proportionally to the school. If students got sick or had skin disease during the cotton picking, they needed to write a letter requesting for treatment. The doctors would come and provide some medicine, but the students were not allowed to return home. Just after a few hours of rest, the student had to go back to work again.

10. There was so much I knew and saw in the cotton industry there. To give a few more examples, farmers from various counties in Aksu Province had different cotton-picking tasks from those of the students. Poor peasants had no place to sleep, and they had to sleep with their young children and families near the quarry. There were also times when they were not given food, and on several occasions, we gave the children some bread with their permission. The school administration somehow heard about this and I was criticized and even punished. I came across this kind of situation many times when going for cotton picking. And I was graded as an underperformer among the teachers who went for cotton picking. These also affected my end-of-year salary and promotion. I became a person who was constantly being marginalized by school leaders, this had a negative psychological impact on me, eventually leading to my forced resignation from school. So, on May 19, 2005, I was suspended from my job at the Aksu Provincial Pedagogical School.

11. The 2nd and 3rd Divisions of Xinjiang Production and Construction Corp, the major area of cotton plantation of Aksu Province, was entirely inhabited by Chinese, and they were the owners of the endless lands of cotton. Cotton industry there was taking advantage of a certain form of forced labour of farmers as well as the unemployed in

various counties and villages in Aksu Province. Among those who came here were others from other provinces, and I also talked with those from Maralbeshi County of Kashgar Province, more than 500 kilometres from the cotton farm. And they were sent to Aksu as forced labour because there was no cotton farm near their hometowns. During the conversations, I learned that some others were even from Hotan Province, more than a thousand kilometres away from Aksu, and that among them were some people over the age of 65 and some younger than 20. All of them were either farmers or unemployed people who were sent by the government as forced labour.

12. After a month of stay with our students, they still couldn't return. And I even witnessed that they worked until the end of November, when all the cotton was picked. I asked them how much they were paid for their work, and they said they were forced to work there for free. And they were not even provided with blankets, which they had to bring with them from home. When it rained, they set up a tent and sleep in it. I saw this when they were left in the rain. Once our students shared their naan bread with the little kids, who cried for food, and elderly people among the farmers. And the Chinese saw this and reported it to our school leaders, resulting in them blaming me. This also negatively affected my performance review at school.
13. Among the cotton pickers were not only high school and college students but also elementary school students. The children of the elementary school were from seven to twelve years old. For example, my brother told me that his kids also went to Uchturpan County for cotton picking for about 15 days in the Chinese-owned cotton fields. His eight-year-old daughter, who was a second grader at the elementary school, was also forced to work in the cotton field.
14. Regarding education, the Aksu Provincial Pedagogical School, established in 1934, was the only pedagogical school in Aksu Province and had a longer history than the Kashgar University. With China's policies of opening up the west in 2004 and supporting Xinjiang's education, they brought many Chinese into the region and made them teachers in primary and secondary schools. As the examples given above, they were not qualified for being teachers: they did not have college degree or a certificate to be

a teacher. They were distributed in primary and secondary schools in all villages and trained for a few years. Then native language of Uyghur people was completely banned at school and the forced Sinicization of Uyghur language was started. I witnessed how the Uyghur people had become the victim of this policies. The Aksu Pedagogical School with a history of seventy years was renamed the Aksu Prefectural Experimental High School, a bilingual school, and the original signage of the Aksu Provincial Pedagogical School was removed in 2004. That is, a school with a seventy-year history of educating teachers for the primary schools was changed into a high school during the execution of the Chinese policy of Sinicization of Uyghur education, which marked then end of bilingual education. Compulsory teaching of subjects such as physics, chemistry, and mathematics in Chinese language had been implemented since that year, leaving many non-Chinese natural science teachers (physics, chemistry, and biology) unemployed. Gradually, they were fired or placed in janitorial positions and dormitory management roles, squeezed out of the teaching field. In 2004, the Chinese could take over any teaching position at school. Even then, I resisted because I was educated in the eastern China and my Chinese was good enough to fluently communicate with the Chinese. The school leaders were also Chinese, and I was able to communicate with them too. I insisted that the exclusion of Uyghurs from the education system and even the conversion of a pedagogical school, which used to train teachers for many primary and secondary schools, into a high school that only focused on Chinese language teaching should be stopped. Because of this, I was severely criticized by school leaders and blamed for inciting ethnic hatred. I was eventually forced to leave the teaching profession.

15. I arrived in the Netherlands on May 5, 2007, and applied for political asylum. I am now a Dutch citizen and work here at the Biochemistry Lab. Since May 23, 2017, my entire relationship with my family has been cut off. This is a photo of my whole family, which was taken on November 4, 2005, two weeks before I was fired and went abroad. Shown in this photo is our house, which was forcibly demolished by the Chinese government in August 2016. It was a large, spacious house in our county. The people in this photo are my family members there. There has been no communication with them since May 23, 2017.

16. The last time I talked to my father on the phone was May 23rd, 2017. Our conversation was a normal asking how things were going and how the kids were doing, and we didn't talk about anything else. My father said on the phone, "Son, work hard and take good care of your life and your children. The Eid is coming soon, and let's chat again at that time." So, in mid-June 2017, it was Eid al-Fitr, and I called my father, but he didn't pick up the phone. Then I called my brothers, my sisters-in-law, and everyone in the family. No one answered the phone. In the meantime, my brother left me a message on WeChat, asking me not to contact them for a while. This is the last message from him. I didn't know what was going on. Then, in mid-August 2017, I called a country acquaintance working in Beijing and now living in the United States and told him that I couldn't get in touch with my family. And I asked him to meet my family. I shared with him my brother's number. He knew my brother. He called my brother and my brother said that I should not contact them, and they were having a hard time before hanging up the phone. I asked my friend to call my brother again to find out what exactly was going on. He tried and my brother just didn't pick up the phone anymore. This is the last message I heard. After that, I tried different ways: I tried calling and communicating with other friends, but nothing worked.

17. In the end of 2017, Omer Bekali travelled to Kazakhstan after being released from a concentration camp for the first time since the concentration camps were built in a large scale in East Turkestan. He spoke up about everything he saw in the concentration camp, and then we realized that there were concentration camps back at home. Then I thought that my family must have been sent to a concentration camp. Then I kept trying everything, and I couldn't get in touch with them. At the same time, I started a one-man demonstration on June 23, 2018, in Amsterdam Dam Square to raise the voice of the family and to make the world aware of the massacre in East Turkestan and to fulfil my responsibilities to the nation as well as my duty of conscience. I made a peaceful protest in Dam Square in order to raise the world awareness of the genocide in East Turkestan by telling my missing family members' stories.

18. This is my father, Abdugheni Hudaberdi, my mother, Tohtihan Bekri. My elder brother, Ablikim Gheni, and his wife, Zinnethan, with a high school education. They have three children: the eldest daughter is Patime Ablikim; the second daughter is Amine Ablikim; and the third daughter is Bumeryem Ablikim. My second brother, Mijit Gheni, his wife, Hasiyet Qurban, with a middle school education, had a tailor's shop in Uchturpan County. They have two children: the eldest daughter Zulfiye and the son Hudabeydi Mijit. This is a picture from back then. My brother, Abdugarim Gheni, was single at that time. All my contact with them has been cut off since May 23, 2017, and I don't know if they are alive or not or detained in a Chinese concentration camp. Both little children disappeared. Since all my contact with my family was cut off, I have been protesting alone in Amsterdam since June 23, 2018, in order to find out where my family members are and inform the world of their suffering and disappearance as well as the massacre in our country.

19. The demonstration has been going on till now. I asked about the 19 members of my family who had disappeared by peaceful protests in front of the Dutch Parliament Square and the Chinese Consulate on every weekend. Here is the reply from the King of the Netherlands, Alexander to my letter. And here are the responses from the Dutch Foreign Minister and the Prime Minister of the Netherlands. And here is the response from the Chinese Consulate to the Dutch Foreign Minister in September 2020 regarding the missing 19 members of my family. Both Chinese and Dutch versions are available here. Everything is clear in the letter: my elder brother Ablekim Ghani was sentenced to 5 years and 6 months; his daughter Fatima Ablekim was sentenced to 6 years and 6 months; Majid Ghani, my second brother, was sentenced to 16 years and 6 months; my wife's brother Turgun Hamidin was sentenced to 16 years and 6 months; and his second brother Adil Hamidi was sentenced to 3 years. There are reports that the other 14 families are living normally, which was a lie by Chinese government.

20. So far, I have not been able to call my family. All their phone numbers are not registered. I have tried all sorts of other ways and got no answer. No one knows anything about my family. It has been 9 months since the Chinese responded to my inquiry by saying that 14 of my family members were living normally. If true, why can't

I contact them? After that, I protested in front of the Chinese embassy and demanded that Chinese embassy should show me a video of my 14 family members just like they broadcasted other activists' families on TV and prove that my family members, who have disappeared, are living normally in China. The Chinese government has so far failed to provide any video of any of my family members that shows that Abdurehim Gheni is lying about them being detained in concentration camps and that they are living normally. That being said, my missing 19 family members are live proof of the Chinese-led massacre.

**I have read and understood this witness statement and I confirm that I agree with its contents. I understand that this statement will be published on the Uyghur Tribunal website and will be available to the general public online.**

**Signature:**

**Date:**